

1. Not-Self: The Banner of Enlightenment

There is a famous *sutta*, a discourse delivered by the Buddha Himself, called *Phenapiṇḍūpama Sutta* in *Samyutta Nikāya – 3. Khandhavaggapāli – 1. Khandhasamyuttaṃ*. This *sutta* contains the Buddha's explanation of the five aggregates by the way of giving a particular simile:

1.	Body	lump of foam
2.	Feelings (/sensations)	water bubble
3.	Perception	mirage
4.	Volitions (/intentions)	plantain stem
5.	Consciousness	illusion

The Pāli Commentary composed for that discourse explains in detail how is each simile related to its respective aggregate. I found the Commentary so helpful, that I even memorized it. Without no mnemonic system, however, I forgot it very soon. To make the Commentary easier for studying, and also to share this excellent tool for *vipassanā* meditation with others, I decided to make a neat overview of the Commentarial account. The Commentary for the *sutta* appears in its respective *aṭṭhakathā* (i.e. commentarial) scripture, but it also appears, in pretty much the same form, in *1. Khandhavibhaṅgo - 1. Suttantabhājanīyavaṇṇanā - 5. Viññāṇakkhandhaniddeso – Kamādivinicchayakathā*. I have the official translation of this Commentary,¹ so I will make my overview from there.

a) Body – Lump of Foam

- No substance: Both lump of foam lack any permanent, lasting, or self- substance
- Cannot be formed: Lump of foam cannot be taken to make a bowl, saucer, etc., and similarly body cannot be taken to make "I" or "mine".
- No essence: Both lump of foam and the body are impermanent, no-self, and foul.
- Holes and joints: Lump of foam is full of holes joined together with many joints, and body is also full of holes and joined by many joints.
- Abode of creatures: Lump of foam is an abode of many creatures such as water snakes etc., and the body is home of eighty families of worms that live there, it is their maternity home, privy, hospital, and charnel ground.
- Grows gradually: Lump of foam is first of the size of a ripe jujube fruit and gradually growing into the size of a mountain peak, and similarly the body has first the size of fetus which gradually becomes a fathom high; or size like a mountain peak in case of oxen, buffaloes, elephants etc.; or size of several hundred leagues in case of fishes, turtles, etc.
- Breaks up: Lump of foam gradually breaks up as soon as it appears, and even if it lasts, it dissolves upon entering the sea. The body also continually breaks up, even in the fetus stage. Later, when it then reaches a century in those whose lifespan is century, it breaks up finally – in the face of death it is converted into minute fragments.

¹ "The Dispeller of Delusion (Sammohavinodanī) Part 1", Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, PTS, Oxford, 1996; pp.36-38 .

b) Feelings (/sensations) – Water Bubble

- a) Unsubstantial: Bubble is unsubstantial, feelings also.
- b) Ungraspable: Bubble breaks up if one tries to form it or seize it, and feeling also leaves nothing behind, ungraspable.
- c) Without duration: Bubble arises because of a drop of water, with no length of duration, and feeling also arises and ceases without a length of duration – “in the moment of one snapping of the fingers it arises and ceases to the number of hundred thousand *koṭis*.²
- d) Conditioned: Bubble arises due to (1) water surface, (2) drop of water, (3) wetness, and (4) the water and the air which holds it up by drawing it together as an envelope, feelings arise also due to four reasons: (1) the physical basis, (2) the object, (3) the flame of defilements, and (4) the impact of impression.

c) Perception – Mirage

- a) Unsubstantial: Mirage and perception are both unsubstantial
- b) Ungraspable: Mirage and perception are both ungraspable, useless – it is not possible to drink it, wash it, bath in it, or fill a pot.
- c) Shaking: Mirage quivers and resembles the movement of waves, and perception – divided up as perception of blue etc. according the respective need – also shakes and quivers.
- d) Deceptive: Mirage deceives many and creates unreal hopes, and perception also deceives and creates false trust and reliance.

d) Volitions (/intentions) – Plantain Stem

- a) Unsubstantial: Plantain stem and perception are both unsubstantial
- b) Ungraspable: Plantain stem and perception are both ungraspable – plantain stem contains no wood (or durable matter) that could be made use of, and formations contain nothing permanent.
- c) Compound: Plantain stem is a combination of many sheaths, and formations aggregate is a combination of many states.
- d) Variegated: Plantain stem has many characteristics according to its respective sheaths, and formations aggregate combines characteristic of impression, volition, etc.

e) Consciousness – Illusion

- a) Unsubstantial: Illusion and perception are both unsubstantial
- b) Ungraspable: Illusion and perception are both ungraspable
- c) Swift: Illusion is changeable and appears swiftly, and consciousness is even more changeable and appears even more swiftly/lightly, being entirely different (every moment of) every posture.
- d) Deceptive: Illusion deceives many and makes them (mentally) grasp that what they see conjured (by the magician), and likewise consciousness seems to be stable at the time of each bodily posture, although in fact it is entirely different every moment.

² One *koṭi* is usually ten millions.

2. Dolphins of Ayeyarwaddy (in Myanmar)

Below I am sharing the notes of recordings, which were done by Snow, one of the best researchers of Shwe Lan Ga Lay project. She has done a great work to take these and other recordings, and she deserves the utmost appreciation. Below I share with you my translation of the relevant recordings. The Burmese recordings were first tediously written down by Ma Htay Htay Lwin, and I have then translated them in English.

- The river Ayeyarwaddy is a big river capable of giving a new power. In the China side, we learn, the Ayeyarwaddy river is recorded in historical records as "beautiful river". The two rivers Mekha and Mali join 28 miles and 2 furlongs north from the Kachin State's capital city Myikyina (မြန်တီးနား) and become the big river Ayeyarwaddy. It is a river that flows from the north of Myanmar to the south.
- "The beginning of Myanmar is in Tagaung (တကောင်း)" – the stone inscription about Myanmar beginning was revealed and destroyed by the Myanmar scholar U Pho Hla in the British era. The Ayeyarwaddy dolphins that travel in the Ayeyarwaddy River have been recorded in the historical records by the Pyu and Myanmar people many years ago. The Ayeyarwaddy dolphins may be seen in the river of Lay Town in Rakhine State, in Kalatan River (ကုလားတန်မြစ်) called Kisapa Nadi (= "tortoise river") (and) all along the straight bank of Taninthari. It is estimated that there are altogether ca. 400 species of dolphins in the Myanmar's Ayeyarwaddy (river). North (/ "above from") Kyauk Myaung (ကျောက်မြောင်း) and Ban-Maw (ပန်းမော်) until Mya Zedi (မြေဝတီ) there are six portions (of the area) regarded as the region of dolphins. For the dolphins of Ayeyarwaddy it is possible to give birth to one baby-dolphin after seven years. For the mother, she can leave her pups between ca. three and five years. The new-born pup has around three feet, and as adult six feet, weighing around 80 viss. The life-span is estimated to be between 30 to 40 years.
- If a dolphin swims and shows in the water by the direction "from up to down", it means it (the dolphin) wants to be followed. In such a case a fisherman will slowly follow (the dolphin) from behind. Dolphins like rowed boats more than boats with installed engine. There, (unlike) when they (the dolphins) can interact with the fishermen more freely, they are afraid that they may get caught in the rotor of a motorboat. The dolphin will stop and show its tail, it will show (/explain) again head keeping body in upright position - if so, (the fisherman) should be aware that there is fish in that place. Because the dolphins are social (animals), there may be at least ("around") two or three dolphins following after a dolphin. In Ayeyarwaddy, when a chief dolphin leads following ("and driving") a group of fish, those (dolphins) that follow are making barrier (/fencing). Then with the meaning of being the right time (to throw the fishing net), by showing its tail again, the fisherman throws the (fishing) net.
- But later, because of the people's greed, by catching fish making electric shocks (in the water), the fish will ("have to") get extinct. Because of the harm by electricity, the backside, side, and belly fins of fish get damaged. ((It is like if) in human case (human) feet and hands would become powerless.) In June and July is the time when the fish breed roe (i.e. fish eggs). As fishermen (/ "water workers"), (they) should know that at that time it is not suitable to catch fish. In other words, at the time of breeding fish, the fish offspring isn't born at a place where (boats etc.) cross the waters. (The fish) search a place to breed its roe in a nearby river tributary, in a pond that occurred at a place of a retreated river-

turn, in a little stream, (or) in water-reservoirs. At that time the the owners of fishtanks (and employers of fishermen) (တံငါးသည်နှင့် ရေလုပ်သမား) who rent a fishpond by auction for a certain period, close the bamboo-screens (of fishing weirs and traps) and catch (that fish) so that it cannot escape. (The bamboo-screens of fishing weirs and traps are a tool for catching fish made of thin bamboo strips.) Some catch the fish by dynamite, upon which the mother-fish and the offspring get completely eradicated.

- Because of the erosion by water of the Ayeyarwaddy river is not uniform, some places are shallow, and some places are deep. Because the Ayeyarwaddy river on the way toward the sea estuary builds up (/ "comes") through the melting of ice, it is always cool. Indeed, when the forests get depleted and there's no more rain, the Ayeyarwaddy river will gradually diminish. Indeed, when the nature is destroyed, the beings that live in water will be destroyed and extinct.
- "Ayeyarwaddy dolphin" is so named with reference to the Ayeyarwaddy river. If (you) are going to watch how the fishermen and dolphins together set the (fishing) nets and catch fish, then that (will) happen only in the months of October, November, December, January, (and) February. Why do (the dolphins) join the fishermen and catch fish? It is because from the (fishing) net thrown by the fishermen some fish escape, (and those) can be easily caught and (then) consumed (by the dolphin-fisherman cooperation). There is (however) a serious danger for the dolphins – making electric shock by battery (engine), closing up the river and chasing up (the animals there) by a long net which is placed along the river (the net is then removed with the fish that got stuck in the net), catching fish by stretching a net from bank to bank and then (after several days even without people watching over) dragging the net along the river. Because the dolphins breath by lungs, when they get entangled in the net they are in the water (/ "sunk") very long, and unable to breath, they may die. When the research is done (/ according to the research), every year there are more species of fish extinct.
- After many years, because of the battery-engine shocks (made in the water to catch fish, illegally), the dolphins get gradually scared of the fishermen. Therefore the decrease in making battery-engine shocks is to be carried out.
- Q: The question (I) want to ask from the fishermen is, how many fishermen are there? What are the accepted (/ official) fees for watching, studying, and tourist guides (related to) the fishing industry?
- A: The fisherman organisation consists of 17 members. Any given fees are accepted, but there is no accepted (/ official) fee. Some (people) give (a fee) according to the days of the fisherman's work [i.e. perhaps studying on a busy day will be more expensive].
- Along (a bank) of Ayeyarwaddy River there is a little village where are fish caught by making (electric) shock (in the river) by battery-engine. Some (first) call on the dolphins, and then make the (electric) shock. Therefore, for long life of the dolphins and for thriving and improvement of the fishermen, those that are at power (together) with the public media (should) support and help from all sides (to prevent these bad habits).

3. Toilet Sticks and What Not

Toilet sticks³ (ကနုတံ, kanote tan) were used long ago in the middle country (esp. Mandalay Region) to clean oneself after defecating. Toilet stick was made from bamboo, and smoothened. It was then kept in an earthen pot at one side of the latrine. Latrine here means two wooden planks placed one next to another, keeping a space in between, in the ground level (i.e. not made into a seat as are the western latrines). The person who is going to defecate will squat, keeping his feet each on each of the planks. He will use a toilet stick from the earthen pot to clean himself and after he uses it he will keep it in another earthen pot on the other side of the toilet (i.e. the toilet stick is never discarded inside the latrine pit). Every day a person who is responsible for cleaning toilets will take these used toilet sticks and clean them in a water stream. After cleaning they are kept in the earthen pot for clean sticks, in the toilet, ready to be used again. There were not many people in these monasteries, hence the use was little, and the smell also not so offensive. Lay people sometimes came into the monastery and “to make merit” also cleaned the used toilet sticks. It is reported that Ledi Sayadaw, during his night cleaning rounds also cleaned the toilet sticks in his monastery, a feat certainly not accomplished by a conceited person.

The case of toilet described above was perhaps not very different from the version mentioned in the Dhammapada story for v. 70, the *Jambukattheravatthu*. *Jambuka* was an ascetic who ate people’s excrement.

“When he knew they were gone, he removed a plank from the public jakes, and descending therein, took up excrement in both his hands, molded it into lumps, and ate it. ... Now the public jakes was a pool of considerable size, formed by a depression in the surface of a flat rock. When Jambuka had been expelled by the Ājīvakas, he used to go by night to the public jakes and eat filth.”⁴

The ascetic Jambuka was later visited by the Buddha Himself, and after listening to the Dhamma taught by the Buddha, ascetic Jambuka became an Arahant with supernatural powers.

May all beings be happy,

monk Sarana

³ I selected this term as a counterpart for “toilet paper”.

⁴ “Buddhist Legends – Translated from the Original Pali Text of the Dhammapada Commentary”, E.W. Burlingame, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1921; vol.2, p.132 and 133.